

## Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 SINGAP 00532 090720Z

ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 EB-03 INR-05 CIAE-00 NSC-05

NSCE-00 /034 W

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R 090600Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7084

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

S E C R E T SINGAPORE 0532

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, ASEA, SN, US, JA

SUBJECT: FUTURE OF ASEAN AS PERCEIVED BY PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW

REFS: (A)STATE 026358, (B) SINGAPORE 0497

1. I GENERALLY CONCUR WITH DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS CONTAINED REFTEL A CONCERNING PRIME MINISTER LEE'S APOCALYPTIC VIEWS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF ASEAN, AND I WILL SEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO CONVEY THESE POINTS IN SUITABLY FORTHRIGHT LANGUAGE TO LEE KUAN YEW. ALTHOUGH THE DEPARTMENT IS QUITE CORRECT IN REGARDING LEE'S OUTLOOK AS BEING UNJUSTIFIABLY PESSIMISTIC AND LACKING IN BALANCE, IT HAS BEEN A MARKED CHARACTERISTIC OF LEE'S PERSONALITY OVER THE YEARS TO VIEW PROBLEMS IN THEIR DARKEST LIGHT AND TO ASSUME THE WORST POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES WILL ENSUE FROM NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENTS. BY ADOPTING THIS ATTITUDE IN DEALING WITH SINGAPORE'S INTERNAL PROBLEMS HE HAS SUCCEEDED IN MAKING THE ISLAND PROSPER BY MARSHALLING THE TOTAL  
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PAGE 02 SINGAP 00532 090720Z

COMMITMENT AND EFFORT OF HIS BEST BRAINS AND BY PERSUADING HIS PEOPLE THAT CONTINUOUS EFFORT AND SACRIFICE ARE REQUIRED TO COPE WITH EVERY PROBLEM, BIG OR SMALL, ACTUAL OR CONTINGENT. IN SHORT LEE IS A PERFECTIONIST WHO DRIVES HIMSELF AND HIS SUBORDINATES TO EXTRAORDINARY LENGTHS IN TACKLING SINGAPORE'S DOMESTIC PROBLEMS. IF THE WORST CASE ON WHICH HIS PLANS ARE PREDICATED FAILS TO MATERIALIZE, SINGAPORE IS JUST THAT MUCH BETTER OFF.

2. ALTHOUGH HE HAS SUCCEEDED BRILLIANTLY IN DEVELOPING SINGAPORE INTO A REMARKABLY PROSPEROUS CITY/STATE THROUGH THIS APPROACH, HE IS FRUSTRATED BY HIS CONSTANT AWARENESS THAT THIS ACHIEVEMENT COULD BE OVERWHELMED BY EXTERNAL FACTORS OVER WHICH HE HAS ONLY MARGINAL INFLUENCE. HIS DESPAIR OVER THE INTERNAL PROBLEMS OF HIS NEIGHBORS AND THE INADEQUACIES OF ASEAN DRIVE HIM INTO OCCASIONALLY OVER ZEALOUS EFFORTS WHICH CAN ALL TOO EASILY AROUSE THE SUSPICIONS OF SOME OF THE OTHER ASEAN GOVERNMENTS AND MAY AT TIMES SEEM EXCESSIVE TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE OCCASION. HOWEVER, AT THE SAME TIME HE OFTEN SERVES AS A USEFUL GADFLY TO THE REGION, AND UNLESS HE CARRIES HIS REFORMING EFFORTS TOO FAR HE MAY HELP TO GENERATE MOVEMENT WHICH MAY LEAD TO GREATER ASEAN ECOOMIC COOPERATION.

3. IN SUSPECT THAT LEE WILL RESPOND TO EVEN MY MOST DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE POSITIONS SET FORTH REFTEL A BY SNORTING THAT IT IS EASY FOR A GOVERNMENT LOCATED 12,000 MILES FROM THE SCENE OF THE ACTION TO CRITICIZE HIS FORBODINGS WITH FINE IMPARTIALITY AND DISMISS THEM AS BEING EXCESSIVE. THE U.S. REACTION TO HIS CONCERNS AS SEEN FROM OUR PERSPECTIVES, AND OUR MORE BALANCED ASSESSMENT OF THE SCENE WILL PROBABLY NOT SERVE TO REASSURE HIM. NEVERTHELESS, IT WILL BE USEFUL FOR HIM TO UNDERSTAND OUR VIEWS. AS REPORTED REF B I HAVE ALREADY MADE USE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS IN JAPAN IN AN EFFORT TO REBUT HIS ASSERTIONS ABOUT U.S. IMPOTENCE. THIS HAS BEEN HELPFUL, BUT FURTHER PUBLIC COMMENTS BY USG OFFICIALS ALONG THESE LINES WILL BE USEFUL IN SUPPORTING OUR REPRESENTATIONS THAT THE U.S. PLANS TO REMAIN INVOLVED IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE AREA.

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PAGE 03 SINGAP 00532 090720Z

HOLDRIDGE

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NNN

## Message Attributes

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**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
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22 May 2009  
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